RAILROAD EXPERIENCE

OF

CONDUCTOR, ROBERT GIFFORD.

I was raised in a little mining camp called Dutch Flat, California, up in the Sierra Nevada mountains. In the summer of 1864 or 1865 when I was 11 or 12 years old, and school was out for the summer vacation, I started out one morning and walked to near Gold Run, four miles, where the Central Pacific was building its railroad.

I came to a big cut where a large crowd of men were working and I asked the foreman for a job. He hired me to lead two horses pulling dump cars from the pit to the dump. At that time I was so short that one of the men tied ropes to the horses' bridles so I could lead them. I worked for three months between Gold Run and Emigrant Gap, on the grade, for 75¢ a day and board.

About the first of the week in each month Mr. Charles Crocker would come along the grade on a sorrel horse with two large leather bags attached to the saddle horn. He would ride into the pit and call out the names of the men; then each man would step up and get his pay for the past month in gold and silver. About once a week Governor Stanford and C. F. Huntington would come on horseback to inspect the work, and I can see them to this day sitting on their horses at the entrance to the pit talking to the foreman and watching the men. I also remember what small engines we had in that day. The C. P. Huntington pulled the pay train of one car, and the Governor Stanford and A. A. Sargent pulled the passenger train, with the sun shining on them, they surely looked beautiful.

One day the Grizzly Bear, a small ten wheeler, struck a cow on a hill just east of Dutch Flat Depot. The accident derailed the engine and when she stopped she was nearly to the bottom of the hill. Hundreds of people came from the mining camps and each would ask the other, "I wonder how the company will get that monstrous piece of iron back on the track.

My next work for the Central Pacific was in March 1874 when I went to work as freight brakeman on the Humbolt division which extended from Winnemucca to Toana but later was cut down to Humbolt Wells. I was hired by J. H. Whited who was Chief Despatcher. The Superintendent was a Mr. Madison who soon was succeeded by G. W. Coddington. Our engines were all little eight wheel Baldwins with 15 x 22 cylinders; numbers 109,110 and 111 on freights. The largest cars were of 15 tons capacity and all of the braking was done by hand except on the passengers which were equipped with the old fashioned straight air. One day a new engine No. 183 with 16 x 24 clyinders came on the division and everybody looked her over and wondered if the bridges and track would hold her up. The engines at this time were mostly built by Baldwin, McCay and Alders, and McQueens.

I did not like the road work, so was placed as switchman and afterward Night Yardmaster in the Winnemucca yard. I was day Yardmaster there when the Jarrett and Palmer Special ran from coast to coast. I received an order from the Superintendent to have the main line clear thirty minutes before the Special was due and to personally go to each main line switch and see that it was corrected and locked. The Special was pulled from Ogden to San Francisco by Engine 149, a balloon stack McQueenie. I worked at this place until June 1880 when my mother who was keeping house for me, developed lung trouble and I was ordered to take her to Arizona. I went to Tucson and went to work the next morning after I got there, hired by L. B. Allen, Chief Despatcher. At that time W. G. Curtis was Superintendent. After a while A. A. Bean succeeded him and later Mr. J. A. Muir. Then Mr. Muir was sent to Los Angeles and my wife being in poor health due to the hot summers, I wrote to him and asked for a change. He replied to come at once, so I left Tucson one afternoon at three o'clock and went to work the second day after as Yardmaster at San Pedro. This was in 1886 and I have been here ever since in the capacities of Yardmaster, Switchman, Brakeman, Freight Conductor and Passenger Conductor. I have worked under the following Superintendents on the Los Angeles Division: E. E. Hewitt, J. A. Muir, W. H. Avrill, H. V. Platte and W. H. Whalen.

P. S. I could tell you more about the old timers that I have worked with in my position as Conductor, such as our general Superintendents A. N. Towne and J. A. Fillmore and our old paymasters Mr. Hanford and Mr. Reddington. Regarding Mr. Hanford it has been said that his memory for faces and names was marvelous, and that once a man showed his face at the wicket, Mr. Hanford knew him as long as he worked for the company. Then there were the old engineers and conductors and yardmasters that I used to work with subsequent to 1874. At this time all engines were coal burners, and trains were controlled by hand brakes and link and pin couplers. Then a crew had to take a train through to destination if it took 40 or more hours. When we had the silver Palace sleeping cars we thought the peak of elegance had been reached but Oh, such a vast difference from the Pullmans of today.